

**PRINCIPLES AND DISCIPLINE**

**OF THE**

**UNITED BRETHREN'S CONGREGATION**

**AT**

**BETHLEHEM, PENNA.,**

**1851.**

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BETHLEHEM:  
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## P R E F A C E.

The Evangelical Church of the United Brethren consists of congregations, either dwelling together in villages of their own, and forming exclusive communities,—or dispersed in cities, towns or whole districts, nevertheless constituting an ecclesiastical body, and providing their own meeting-houses. The former are called *Brethren's Settlements*; the latter, *City* or *Country congregations*. No distinction obtains with respect to their chief Christian calling, which is common to all congregations of the Brethren's Church.

Bethlehem, from its commencement, was a congregation of the former class, which, besides its religious union, likewise formed a civil community, similar to our settlements elsewhere, and for the administration of its secular affairs established such institutions, and adopted such rules and regulations, as are peculiar to the settlements of the United Brethren.

For a number of years, however, experience had shown, that at Bethlehem these peculiar institutions, and more especially the statute, which permitted no one, who was not a member of the Church, to be or become a permanent resident in the town of Bethlehem, could not, in process of time, be sustained and enforced, without encountering almost insuperable difficulties, and endangering the best interests of this congregation. The constituted authorities of the church, accordingly, after mature and deliberate reflection, concluded in the beginning of the year 1844, to repeal the then existing constitution of the congregation at Bethlehem. This required a revision of the Rules and Regulations for the congregation, in which, however, that portion of our Principles and Discipline, which had a bearing upon the religious union of the congregation, should continue in full force and validity; while so much only, as related to the external and secular concerns of the congregation, should be subjected to amendment and alteration, adapted to the recent change of circumstances.

The constitution of the congregation at Bethlehem, thus modified, remained in force for several years; when various considerations led to a further change, embracing the incorporation of the Brethren's Church in this borough, by the legislature of the state of Pennsylvania. This proposition, having, after joint discussion, received the sanction of the Provincial Helpers' Conference, together with the draft of an act of incorporation, and certain articles of agreement between the congregation at Bethlehem on the one hand, and the constituted authorities of the Church on the other hand, was, on the 13th of February 1851, submitted to a numerous meeting of the congregation-council, and adopted. The preliminary steps, towards carrying the measure into execution, were taken at the same time, and resulted in the incorporation of the Brethren's Church at Bethlehem, by an act of Assembly of the State of Pennsylvania, during their late session at Harrisburg; which act, on the 3d of April of the above year, 1851, received the signature of the Governor, and thus became a law.

This new change required another revision of the Rules and Regulations for the government of this congregation in secular matters, to be made in accordance with the charter of the incorporated Brethren's Church at Bethlehem; while that part of the Principles and Discipline, which has reference to the spiritual concerns of the congregation, should remain unchanged, as before.

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## I. RULES AND REGULATIONS,

RELATING TO THE INTERNAL OR SPIRITUAL STATE AND  
CHARACTER OF THE CONGREGATION.

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1. The Brethren's Church with its congregations is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone." (Eph. 2, 20.) Their confession of faith is: "Christ is All and in All;" (Col. 3, 11.) their aim: "the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." (Phil. 3, 14.) And their endeavor: "to press toward the mark" set before them, by faith in Jesus, in the love of God, and in the hope of eternal life, by holding fast the doctrine of Christ and his apostles, by faithfully keeping his commandments, and steadfastly following his footsteps.—

2. Hence, a congregation of the Brethren, and that of Bethlehem among the rest, can have no other object in view, as the aim of their religious union, than to be and remain, in doctrine and in practice, a church of Jesus Christ.

3. The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, as testifying of Jesus, and being the only source of all true Christian doctrine and morals, must therefore be the only rule of faith and of practice in this congregation.

4. Hence also it is necessary, that the truths of the revealed word of God be made known to all the members, by means of public preaching, by special religious instruction of youth, and by personal reading and searching of the scriptures.—

5. The meetings appointed for public preaching and for meditating on the word of God, as well as all other opportunities for mutual edification, should therefore be highly valued and diligently improved.

6. The knowledge of the doctrine of Jesus Christ, however, must needs, by the power of divine grace, lead to a walk and conversation well-pleasing to God, if ever the object of Christ's loving the church, and giving himself for her, is to be attained, and she to become a church," that should be holy and without blemish." (Eph. 5, 25—27.

7. Above all, we are to strive, that the love of God, and of our neighbor, as "the bond of perfectness," (Col. 3, 14.) and "the fulfilling of the law," (Rom. 13, 10.) may so prevail in the congregation, as to sway our thoughts, words and actions.

8. It hence becomes the indispensable duty of a congregation, desirous of being a society of disciples and followers of Jesus, to cherish cordial brotherly love, and mutual benevolence, serving one another, exercising forbearance and a peaceable disposition, and carefully abstaining from every thing of an opposite tendency, or likely to produce discord.—

9. Poor and destitute, as well as sick and suffering members of the church must be special objects of our fraternal sympathy, liberality and relief, according to their necessities, and as far as lies in our power.

10. Members, that have erred or gone astray, should be treated with tenderness and patience, and "restored in the spirit of meekness."—And whenever an insult or injury is inflicted by one member upon another, we should act according to the rule, laid down by the Savior himself for such cases, (Matth. 18, 15—18. "If thy brother shall trespass against thee &c.")—and should first endeavor, by all proper means, to adjust the difference through brotherly mediation, before legal redress be sought.—

11. Moreover, all true children of God in other denominations should be met in the same spirit of brotherly love and fellowship of faith; avoiding, both in public and in private, all controversies about opinions and customs, peculiar to one or another denomination of Christians.

12. To brotherly kindness we should add charity towards all mankind, (II. Pet. 1, 7.), and, in consequence, we should show in our conversation and intercourse with neighbors and others, a friendly, kind and upright deportment, combined with the strictest conscientiousness. In so doing, we are nevertheless to avoid all such intercourse and associations, as are inconsistent with a truly Christian spirit,—and a participation in such worldly amusements, as render the character, becoming a member of the Brethren's Church, suspected, or may justly prove a stumbling-block and offence to others.

13. Knowing, that "God our Savior will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth,"—(I. Tim. 2, 4.) the members of a congregation must needs feel constrained by love, to take the liveliest interest in the spread of the gospel throughout the world, and especially among the heathen,—and consider themselves in duty bound, to aid by their fervent intercessions and active co-operation, the missionary cause, not only of the Brethren's Church, but also that of other religious denominations.

14. In reference to this love towards our neighbor and to all men, we are finally to bear in mind the important charge of our Lord and Master : " I say unto you, love your enemies ; bless them that curse you ; do good to them that hate you, and pray for them, which despitefully use you and persecute you." Matth. 5, 44.—May He grant us grace, as occasion may require, to exemplify these highest and most difficult evidences of that love to mankind, which comes nearest to the manifestations of his own divine love.

15. With respect to the government of our country, it is the duty of every Christian, and hence of every member of our Church, to love, honor and pray for the same ; to yield due obedience to the laws of the land, and under no pretence whatsoever, to evade the payment of taxes legally imposed ; and to endeavor also to promote, in every way, the good of the land, wherein we dwell.

16. Regarding the education of children, we should observe the apostolic injunction, (Eph. 6, 4.) "to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." Hence it is expected, that all parents and heads of families should use all diligence, in guarding their children against harm and offence ; themselves manifesting, in their whole deportment, the character of true Christians, and thus inducing them also to follow Jesus ; that they faithfully train up their children to attend school, religious instruction and divine worship, and to engage in useful occupations, adapted to their capacity, while at home ; laboring also, as they advance in years, to cultivate in them correct principles, and propriety of manners and conduct.

17. On leaving school, our youth should continue to attend religious instruction, until the time of their confirmation ; and they ought to be so thoroughly imbued with the knowledge

of the truth, which is unto godliness, according to the scriptures, that they may not only treasure up in their understanding and memory the doctrines of salvation, but learn chiefly to apply them to their hearts.

18. In as much as it behooves every member of the church, in all things to walk worthy of the gospel; so also shall those, who give offence to others, and refuse correction, after repeated admonition and reproof, be excluded from church-fellowship, according to the rule, laid down by the apostle: (I. Cor. 5, 13.) "Put away from among yourselves that wicked person."—

19. If, therefore, any member, in word or deed, act contrary to the rules and regulations of the church, and by his example tempt others to do the same; transgressing the laws of the country, over-reaching his neighbor in trade, or being guilty of lying, backbiting and calumny, giving himself up to drunkenness, contracting debts without necessity, or neglecting to satisfy his creditors,—committing the sins of cursing and swearing, fornication and adultery, or other manifest works of the flesh, as enumerated Gal. 5, 19—21., such an one can no longer be considered as a member of the church.—

## II. RULES AND REGULATIONS,

### RELATING TO THE EXTERNAL OR SECULAR CONSTITUTION OR FORM OF GOVERNMENT OF THE CONGREGATION.

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1. Such persons only may be received and regarded as members of the Brethren's congregation at Bethlehem, who do not only sustain a good character, and approve of the doctrine, principles and discipline of the Brethren's Church in general, but also assent to all the constitutional Rules and Regulations of this congregation in particular, and, with respect to the affairs of the Church at large, feel under obligation to recognize the authorities of the United Brethren's Church, duly appointed agreeably to Synodical enactments, and to obey their constitutional ordinances and directions.—

2. Essential changes in the constitution of our Church can be made only in consequence of resolutions, passed by constitutionally organized *Synods*. (Prep. Prov. Conf. 1847, § 36.)

3. These *Synods* are either *General Synods* of the whole Brethren's Unity, or *Provincial Synods*, i. e. *Synods* of the several sections of the Brethren's Church, in the different countries, where congregations of Brethren have been established.

4. In the Northern Section of the Brethren's Church in the United States, to which the congregation at Bethlehem belongs, such Provincial *Synods*, agreeably to existing synodical resolutions, are to be held once in about six years. (Prep. Prov. Conf. 1847, § 34.)

5. To these Provincial *Synods*, the congregation at Bethlehem elects six delegates, all of whom shall be members of this congregation. All delegates, for whatever purpose elected by the congregation, must be members of the same. All male members of the congregation, who are communicants of full age, and agreeably to the rules of this congregation entitled to a vote, are voters at these elections. (Charter, Sect. 7.—Prep. Prov. Conf. 1847, § 35. III.)

6. Elections of delegates to these Provincial Synods shall be held in the same manner as elections of *Trustees* and *Elders* of this congregation. (Charter, Sect. 5.) In this case, however, as also in elections occasioned by vacancies in the Provincial Helpers' Conference, (Prov. Synod 1849, Part II. § xix.) it shall be the duty of the *board of Elders*, to appoint those three persons, who are to hold the election. Such only shall be considered duly elected, as shall have received a majority of the votes given. Should an election remain undecided, in as much as several brethren received an equal number of votes, or should refusals to serve, resignations or vacancies occur, a new election must be held, at such time as shall be designated by the Committee already appointed to hold the election.—

7. The Provincial Synod has the right to elect delegates to the General Synods of the Brethren's Church. Moreover, the Provincial Synod has the right to elect two of the three members of the Provincial Helpers' Conference,—henceforth styled the “Provincial *Elders'* Conference of the Northern Section of the Brethren's Church in the United States,”—in the way and manner prescribed by synodical resolutions. (Prep. Prov. Conf. 1847, § 37.)

8. By the General Synods, the *Unity's Elders' Conference* is appointed, which is the standing Synodical Committee during the interval between one General Synod and the next, acting in the name and by authority of the General Synod. (Prep. Prov. Conf. 1847, § 26.) To this board the Provincial Elders' Conference is subordinate.

9. The *Provincial Elders' Conference*, (see the Charter of that board) agreeably to Synodical enactments, is intrusted with the superintendence (see § 25 of these Rules &c.) of the external or financial, and internal or ecclesiastical concerns of the Northern Section of the Brethren's Church in the United States, (Charter, Sect. 11.) ; and accordingly with the sole authority of filling all such offices in our congregations, as require the services of ordained brethren. (Charter, Sect. 9. —Prep. Prov. Conf. 1847, § 68.)

10. Besides the above, the congregation at Bethlehem has local authorities of its own, designated by the names of a *board of Elders*, and a *board of Trustees*, together with a

*School-board*; the relations of which to each other, to the church, and to the government of the church at large, are determined by the Charter. The mode of election, the duties and the powers of these different local authorities are described in detail by the Charter, Sect. 4th to 15th.—

11. At the same time, and in the same manner, with the election of Elders, Trustees and members of the School-board; there shall be elected the *directors of the poor-fund* of the congregation, consisting of five communicant brethren of full age, of which number one is to be elected annually for a term of five years.—

12. Whenever it shall be deemed expedient by the board of Elders or the board of Trustees, congregational matters may by them be submitted to the *Congregation-Council*, which consists of all the members of the Congregation entitled to vote, as laid down in the Charter, Sect. 7th to 10th. In this Congregation-Council, the president of *that* board (of Elders or of Trustees) shall preside, by which the meeting shall have been convened.

13. The board of Elders has to determine, for what purposes the church-edifice may be used. The archives and the library of the congregation are entrusted to the care of the Ministers. The charge of attending to the preservation of the church-edifice, ministers' dwellings, school-houses, the corpse-house and graveyard, belongs to the board of Trustees. The same board shall appoint all those persons, who receive compensation for their services in or about the church, the corpse-house and the graveyard. The organist, however, and the principal chapel-servant shall be appointed by the board of Trustees with the concurrence of the board of Elders. The rest of the chapel-servants, male and female, shall be appointed by the board of Elders.—

A written permit for interment in our graveyard, in favor of such as were not members of the congregation, must in all cases be obtained from the president of the board of Elders and the treasurer of the board of Trustees, acting jointly.—

14. The resolutions and ordinances of the constituted local authorities shall be accepted and complied with, by all the members of the congregation; and the contributions requi-

site for supporting the institutions of the church or of divine service, shall be punctually paid by all. (Charter, Sect. 4 & 7.)

15. In view of that bond of union, which connects the congregation at Bethlehem with the Brethren's Church at large, its members should feel themselves under obligation, to take a brotherly and active part in the general necessities of the whole Unity, and especially of the Brethren's Missions in Christian and heathen lands; every one contributing according to his ability.

16. Persons, not hitherto members of the Brethren's Church, desiring to become members of our congregation at Bethlehem, must apply to the president of the board of Elders, who will submit their application to that board; the latter having full liberty, according to circumstances, to dismiss such application at once, or to suspend the matter for the time being. If, however, the board deem the granting of the application admissible, the applicant shall be furnished with a printed copy of our Rules and Regulations, with the recommendation, to give them a thorough consideration.—

Should the applicant, after having thus perused them, declare, that he or she do fully approve of them, and is willing, strictly to conform to them, in such case an opportunity shall be afforded for him or her to repeat this declaration in presence of the board of Elders, or, by way of exception, before a committee of that board; and, if the applicant be a male of full age, to confirm the declaration by subscribing his name to these Rules and Regulations. As soon as a person is thus accepted as a member of the congregation, the board of Elders shall give notice thereof to the board of Trustees. It shall be left to the board of Elders to determine, at what age an applicant may be received as a member of the congregation.—

17. Whenever members of other congregations of the Brethren remove to Bethlehem, they shall call upon the president of the board of Elders, and render satisfactory evidence of their claim to membership; and in like manner, whenever members of the congregation at Bethlehem are about to remove from this place, they shall give due notice to the president of the board of Elders; if they neglect to do so, it shall be taken for granted, that they are no longer to be regarded as members of the congregation.—

18. In any case, such male adults only shall be considered full members of our congregation, who, besides the other requisitions of the charter, shall have complied with this condition also, that, having become of age, they bound themselves to the observance of these Rules and Regulations, by their signature. This subscribing of their names on the part of such, as have become of age, or have just united with the church, or removed hither from other congregations, can take place only in presence of the president of the board of Elders, who shall add the date and year opposite to the signature.—

19. Candidates for admission to membership, who were heretofore connected with another religious denomination, are required, if possible, to produce certificates of their baptism, and if communicants, of their confirmation and admission to the Lord's table.—The same holds good in regard to their baptism, in case they were not in connexion with any church. If, however, they are still unbaptized, they are at once to be notified, that they cannot be admitted to the fellowship of our church, unless they at the same time entertain a desire to be baptized, as soon as that ordinance can be suitably administered to them.

20. Whenever married couples, having children, are admitted to church-membership, such only of their offspring, as are under fourteen years of age, shall be considered as entering within the pale of the church along with their parents. The same rule applies, when one of the parties only joins the church, after they shall have come to an agreement between themselves, how to dispose of their children in this respect.

21. Whenever members of the church desire to enter together into the state of matrimony, they are to give notice of their intention to either of the ministers of the congregation, *previous* to the ceremony of their marriage, which, as a general rule, they will call on him to perform; while the minister, in so doing, is bound to guard against every infraction of the laws of this country.—

A brother, desiring to marry a female, who is not a member of our church, or a sister, desiring to take a husband not belonging to the Brethren's congregation, shall give notice of such intention, *before* their marriage, to the president of the board of Elders, if they wish to retain their claim to membership; otherwise, they shall no longer be considered as mem-

bers. Of all such cases, the board of Trustees shall be duly notified,

22. The board of Elders shall in every case give notice to the treasurer of the board of Trustees, whenever adult members of the Brethren's Church remove hither from other congregations, or when persons of full age unite with the church, or when members, with the knowledge of the board of Elders, remove from this place, or when such leave the congregation, or are excluded from church-fellowship.—

23. Whenever the board of Elders has to decide the question, whether an individual, hitherto a member of the congregation, shall any longer be regarded as such, (according to Sect. I. § 18 and 19 of these Rules &c.), the case shall be taken into the most serious consideration, the member in question shall be heard by the president of the board of Elders, (or, if need be, in the case of females, by a duly authorized sister,) and every thing else shall be done, that the case may be determined according to its merits and the truth; and then only, when there is clear and satisfactory evidence, so as to render exclusion from the church unavoidable, shall the board of Elders proceed and decide accordingly; whereof the president of the board shall give due notice, orally or in writing, to the party concerned.

If, however, the transgression be such, as to have given public offence, or amount to a violation of the laws of this country, and hence be liable to judicial investigation and legal penalty, it follows of course, that the party thus found guilty, can no longer be considered a member of the church. (Charter, Sect. 10.)

24. The board of Trustees is bound, regularly, and at least two weeks previous to the day of the general elections, held for the purpose of filling the different offices in the congregation, to submit their list of all the members actually entitled to vote, to the board of Elders, for the most careful revision and correction.

25. All resolutions of the board of Trustees, of the board of Elders and of the School-board, not referring merely to their current business, but containing permanent regulations, shall be submitted for approbation to the Provincial Elders'

Conference ; who shall, however, be at liberty to withhold that sanction, *only* in case such resolutions, in the opinion of said Conference, are at variance with the principles and constitutional rules of the Brethren's Church. It is, upon the whole, both the duty and the right of the Provincial Elders' Conference, to guard against the enactment and enforcement, by any authority of the congregation, of resolutions, which are not in accordance with the principles and constitution of our Church.

26. All resolutions of the board of Trustees, of the board of Elders and of the School-board, which contemplate or embrace amendments to these present rules of the congregation, or the repealing of single articles, or the annulling of the whole, or additions to said rules, must not only be submitted for approbation to the Provincial Elders' Conference ; but, when thus approved, must also be referred to a meeting of the adult male communicants of the congregation, for that purpose convened, to be either adopted or rejected by that body.

Proposals, offered in a meeting of the congregation-council, to amend the rules of the congregation, or make additions to the same, cannot be decided upon, at once, in the same meeting, in which they were introduced, but can only be adopted or rejected in a subsequent meeting, expressly convened for that purpose ;—nor can they be deemed valid, unless they be not only adopted in the congregation-council by a *majority* of the votes given by the members present and entitled to vote, but also sanctioned by the Provincial Elders' Conference.

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## CONCLUSION.

The foregoing Rules and Regulations of the Brethren's Congregation at Bethlehem, after having received the approval of the constituted authorities of the congregation, and the sanction of the Provincial Elders' Conference, were adopted by a meeting of the congregation-council, held on the 28th day of August, 1851 ; when it was, at the same time, *Resolved*, that every member of the congregation-council shall receive a printed copy of these Rules and Regulations, and by his signature,—which subscription of his name, in order to entitle him to vote, must have taken place ten days previous to a pending election,—shall declare his assent and adhesion to said Rules and Regulations.—

